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Pulkkinen, Veijo Kullervo

2016

Pulkkinen , V K 2016 , ' The Hidden Sigh : The End of the Avant-Garde in Olavi Paavolainen and Aaro Hellaakoski ' , Journal of Finnish studies , vol. 19 , no. 1 , pp. 27-54 .

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/303232

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The Hidden Sigh: The End of the Avant-Garde in Olavi Paavolainen and Aaro Hellaakoski

Veijo Pulkkinen
Finnish Literature Society, SKS[1]
Translated by Sophy Bergenheim

Abstract
This article presents a new perspective on research in Finnish modernist literature by examining the idea of the end of the avant-garde in Olavi Paavolainen's (1903–64) and Aaro Hellaakoski's (1893–1952) views on modernism in the late 1920s. Paavolainen was one of the most prominent figures in the contemporary debate on modernism; Hellaakoski's typographically experimental poetry collection *Jääpeili* (Ice mirror) is considered to be a pioneer in Finnish modern poetry. In this article, the end of the avant-garde refers to the impression that the most experimental trends had already passed elsewhere in Europe. In Finland, the end of the avant-garde was, on the one hand, used as a weapon against modernists, but on the other, it also played a significant role in the understanding of the present state of art by the defenders of modernism.

Keywords: antimodernism, the avant-garde, modernism, visual poetry

Introduction

In the foreword for his translation of Ilya Ehrenburg's essay "Uusi romantiikka" (New romanticism, 1927), Olavi Paavolainen—the Finnish poet, essayist, and inspirational leader of the modernist literary group Tulenkantajat (Torch bearers)—brings attention to the phenomena within Finnish cultural life, where, according to him, "paljastuu salattu huokaus: 'Taivaalle kiitos, että taistelu on jo ohitse, ja että

1 This work was supported by the Academy of Finland (project number 251025); the Finnish Cultural Foundation (grant number 00110730); and the Finnish Literature Society, SKS.

voimme ruveta rauhassa elämään!'" (the hidden sigh is revealed: 'Thank heavens that the battle is over, and that we can commence our peaceful lives!') (Paavolainen 1927a, 31). As I shall demonstrate in more detail in the following, the battle and its end refer to a conception that the most extreme and experimental trends of modernism—which we today call the avant-garde—were no longer topical in the late 1920s. Paavolainen's foreword has rightly been perceived as the manifesto of the machine romanticist phase of Tulenkantajat (Palmgren 1989, 76). Its genre could also be described as a sort of apology. Paavolainen is defending the avant-garde and seeks to convince the sighing reader that it is still relevant, even though its heyday has already passed in Europe.

The importance of the avant-garde in Finnish literature in the 1910s and 1920s has often been belittled, since it did not adopt the aesthetic and ideological values and stylistic norms of the Western centers of art history, such as Paris, Zurich, Berlin, and Vienna (Huuhtanen 1978, 23–24, 78–80, 94; Lassila 1987, 26, 109–12; Lappalainen 1993, 53; Envall 1998, 157; Sadik-Ogli 2000a, 49; 2000b, 46; Haapala 2007, 277–80; Herzberg, Haapala, and Kantola 2012, 447, 454, 456–57). In addition to such a center-oriented viewpoint, the avant-garde can also be studied horizontally, as Piotr Piotrowski has suggested. Rather than the norms dictated by the center, one can instead take special cultural characteristics as a starting point and examine the different positive or negative ways in which the avant-garde has been received, applied, adopted, and seized in the margins (Piotrowski 2009, 55–56; cf. van den Berg, Hautamäki, Hjartarson, Jelsbak, Schönström, Stounbjerg, Ørum, and Aagesen 2012a, 633–36; 2012b).

In the following, I will explore the conception of the end of the avant-garde as a margin-oriented viewpoint. The fact that Paavolainen—the most prominent Finnish-speaking advocate of modernism—took seriously the thought of the end of the avant-garde and—as we shall see—even admitted it to be true, implies that the end of the avant-garde in Europe had an impact on how the avant-garde was received in Finland in the late 1920s. The conception of the end of the avant-garde provides one vantage point on how the avant-garde was brought to Finland, what reactions it sparked, how it was understood among advocates and opponents, and how it was applied within the arts.

In this article, I will study how the idea of the end of the avant-garde manifests in Paavolainen's and Aaro Hellaakoski's late 1920s texts on modernism. Both are central figures of the Finnish modernism of the 1920s. Paavolainen was one of the most prominent figures in the contemporary debate on modernism. Hellaakoski's

role, on the other hand, is based on his typographically experimental poetry collection *Jääpeili* (Ice mirror, 1928a), which is today regarded as a trailblazer within Finnish modernist poetry (Laitinen 1997, 389; Envall 1998, 154–55; Grünthal 1999b, 208; Hertzberg, Haapala, and Kantola 2012, 456).

Defining the avant-garde in a universally applicable way is an ungrateful task, since there always seem to be movements or groups that question the common features and properties that are used to describe it. The avant-garde is not just an artistic movement; it is also considered as a political, historical, and economic phenomenon. Many researchers distinguish between the so-called historical avant-garde that took place from the 1910 to the 1930s and included such movements as Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, and the neo-avant-garde of later periods. It is quite common to think of the avant-garde as extreme modernism, i.e., the tendency to question traditional art forms and values in order to grasp the modern sense of reality that had begun in the late nineteenth century. Thus, in the avant-garde, experiments with form and antagonism towards institutions of art were taken to extreme measures, and the aim was often to change reality (Hautamäki 2007, 22; Katajamäki and Veivo 2007, 12–14; Możejko, 2007, 19, 22, 28–29).

In this article, the concept of the avant-garde is used similarly as an extreme form of modernism, and it is obviously limited to historical avant-garde. This is a pragmatic definition of the relationship between the avant-garde and modernism, when one is examining the situation in Finland in the late 1920s, where neither the concept of modernism nor the rarely used concept of the avant-garde had a uniform meaning (Takala 1990, 56–60; Lappalainen 1993, 28–30; Riikonen 2007, 847–48). Words like "uusi" (new), "uudet suunnat" (new movements), "ismit" (isms), "nykyaika" (the present), "nykysuuntaukset" (present movements), "moderni" (modern), and "modernismi" (modernism) were used interchangeably, and it was common to use Expressionism as an umbrella term for all modernist art movements throughout the 1920s. Often these terms were equipped with modifiers such as "äärimoderni" (extreme modern), "ultramoderni" (ultra modern), or "superultramoderni" (super ultra modern) to distinguish particularly extreme branches of modernism (see, for example, Diktonius 1922, 128; 1925, 126; Wennervirta 1922, 157; Hintze 1923, 83; Bergroth and Matson 1928b, 24; Viljanen 1928).

The End of the Avant-Garde

The reluctant reception of the avant-garde in Finland in the 1910s and 1920s is partly explained by the country's historical-political situation. Finland had just gained

independence from Russia in 1917, which was followed by a civil war in 1918, as the Finnish conservative Senate (the Whites) and the Finnish People's Delegation led by the Social Democrats (the Reds) ended up in arms against each other. The war ended in the defeat of the Reds, and the conservative atmosphere that followed favored art that supported the national identity and shunned international influences. The anti-avant-garde cultural critique was politically motivated and was linked with anti-Russian sentiments. The avant-garde was perceived as a morbid manifestation of modernism, and as a cultural Bolshevist trend flowing from Russia. The phenomenon existed in other Nordic countries as well—particularly in Norway and Iceland, which had also just gained their independence. Also the core centers of the avant-garde witnessed resistance, for instance in Germany, where the term *cultural Bolshevism* (German: *Kulturbolschewismus*) was originally introduced (Wrede 1985, 257–58; Huusko 2012, 565–69; van den Berg 2012, 42–43).

One way of coping with the avant-garde in conservative Finland was parody. Parodies of the avant-garde are one of its manifestations as a cultural phenomenon as well as seriously created works of art. Although their motives might be contrary to the avant-garde, parodies bear witness to the appropriation and transmission of the avant-garde (van den Berg et al. 2012b, 422). The most famous case is probably Åke Erikson's *Den hemliga glöden* (The secret glow, 1925). It was a collection of free verse poetry published under a pseudonym by the conservative Finnish-Swede poet Bertel Gripenberg (1878–1947). Hagar Olsson (1893–1978), for example, fell for it and was thrilled for a new poet joining the modernist ranks. When the real author was revealed, the work was interpreted as a parody of modernism and as proof that anyone could write modernist poetry. However, according to Gripenberg, the collection was not entirely parodic since he was sincerely interested in free verse poetry (Wrede 1985, 261–72).

Humor magazines like *Kurikka* (The beater) and the rightwing journal *Tähystäjä* (The lookout) constantly poked fun at the Tulenkantajat group and their modernist poetry. Tulenkantajat were mostly depicted as unruly children who wrote incomprehensible poems but who themselves regarded their achievements as strokes of genius. The genre was often parody that mimed forms of modernist poetry and the idolizing of modern phenomena. Some poets reputed to be modernists also ridiculed modernism, as in the "Futuristinen ilta-aaria" (Futuristic evening aria) by Uuno Kailas (1901–33) (1922, 67–69), a member of the Tulenkantajat group, or Hellaakoski in several poems of *Jääpeili* (1928a).

One aspect that has received less attention in research on the reception of the avant-garde in Finland in the late 1920s is the impression that the time of the most extreme modernist experiments had already passed elsewhere in Europe. The conception of the end of the avant-garde was often used as a weapon to strike against modernists. For example, the writer and artist Viljo Kojo (1891–1966) criticized Hellaakoski and his typographical experiments in *Jääpeili* for clinging to "this style of fashion, while it already is a defeated stand elsewhere."[2] On the other hand, central representatives and advocates of modernism, such as the Swedish-speaking Finnish writers Olsson and Raoul af Hällström (1899–1975) took note of the waning of avant-gardist extremism.

In addition to such avant-gardist trends as Purism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, the international field of art in the 1920s was also influenced by the neo-classical orientation, which returned to the traditions of art and the values it represented, which were seen as timeless and universal. At the center of neo-classicism lay post-war France: amid the reconstruction process, the return of art to *tradition* and order was perceived as a nation-unifying trend. Italy's *Novocento* and the New Objectivity (in German: *Neue Sachlichkeit*) in Germany and the Netherlands, among others, are likewise representative of similar opposing reactions to the avant-garde and of the return to tradition. In many countries, the avant-garde was perceived as chaotic, foreign, and unpatriotic. In France, it was paralleled with German barbarity, whereas a French culture that stressed rationality and order was understood as the successor and defender of classical civilization (Salosaari 1964, 92; Bossaglia 1987, 52; Green 1987, 190; Silver 1989, 11, 25–26, 89; Cowling and Mundy 1990, 11–12; Härmänmaa 2000, 145–46; Riikonen 2000, 261; Nicholls 2009, 265–66).

During the First World War and the period that followed, many artists who had gained fame as avant-gardists, such as Georges Braque, Achille Funi, Fernand Léger, Jean Metzinger, Pablo Picasso, and Gino Severini, moved on to a more traditional form of expression, and themes and influence were sought from Roman frescos as well as the artistic traditions of Italy and France (Green 1987, 52–59, Silver 1989, 142–44, 154–55, 164; Cowling and Mundy 1990, 13–15; Härmänmaa 2000, 146–47). Classical themes also became more popular within music, theater, and literature. France, in particular, saw the rise of classical themes between the two World Wars. These themes were utilized by Jean Cocteau, André Gide, Jean

2 "… tähän muotikauteen, kun se muualla on jo voitettu kanta" (Kojo 1928, 10). All translations from Finnish and Swedish into English are by Sophy Bergenheim.

Giraudoux, Raymond Radiguet, and Paul Valéry, among others (Salosaari 1964, 92–93, 161; Brée 1983, 83; Riikonen 2000, 254–55, 261).

Many avant-garde and modernist representatives of the 1920s labeled the pre-war avant-garde movements, such as Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism, anachronistic and outdated. The short-lived Dadaism was also soon added to this group. In Finland, the European field of art thus offered the possibility of interpreting the current state of art either as the end of the avant-garde and the return to tradition, or as the birth of a new modernist trend, or, rather, a new style period that had its root in the avant-garde but defined the field of art and the zeitgeist on a more general level. Simply put, the former stressed the end of the avant-garde, while the latter emphasized the continuum between the avant-garde and the current state of art.

An example of the former viewpoint is the essay "Maalaustaiteen uusimmista suunnista" (On the newest trends in the art of painting, 1924) by Onni Okkonen (1886–1962), one of the most prominent art critics of the time. He begins by outlining the importance of Expressionism and Cubism, largely disregarding Futurism and Dadaism as belonging to the degenerative extreme edges of Expressionism. While presenting the newest trends, Okkonen does not give even the slightest hint of the existence of Surrealism. Instead, he highlights Henri Rousseau's Naivism, Henri Matisse's Fauvism, and André Derain's neo-classicism. Derain started his career as a Cubist, but moved on to traditional expression, in order to lead, in Okkonen's words, "the art of painting into some new classicism."[3] According to Okkonen, the return to national traditions and the revival of classical ideals were also traits of the newest international trend within the art of painting (Okkonen 1924, 475–76).

Another example is the essay on Dadaism "Kouristustako vai huijausta kirjallisella alalla" (A literary convulsion or a hoax, 1925) by the literary critic Aarne Anttila (1892–1952). Anttila regarded Dadaism as a continuation of the divergence of the art field into various conflicting movements following the demise of naturalism in the 1890s. According to Anttila, Dadaism was just an insane hoax motivated by money making. In Germany, Dadaism was still alive, but in France most Dadaists had come to their senses: "Thus is French Dadaism admitted to be dead even by its youngest adherents. Nothing has been heard from the leaders in a couple of years, and others have returned to ordinary literature."[4] Anttila (1925) concluded

3 "… maalaustaiteen johonkin uuteen klassisuuteen" (Okkonen 1924, 475).

4 "Niinpä onkin ranskalainen dadaismi kuollut nuorimpienkin kannattajiensa tunnustusten mukaan. Johtajista ei ole pariin vuoteen kuulunut mitään ja toiset ovat palanneet tavalliseen kirjallisuuteen." (Anttila 1925, 3)

that there was no reason to take Dadaism as a prelude to any future art movement. In his *Johdatus uudenajan kirjallisuuden valtavirtauksiin ja lähteitä niiden valaisemiseksi* (An introduction to the main movements of literature in modern times and sources for their examination, 1926) Anttila lists dozens of other short-lived avant-garde movements and considered the revival of neo-classicism to be a counteraction to the reckless pursuit for modernity (Anttila 1926, 261–63).

A more positive attitude towards the avant-garde was, for example, presented in the essay "Marinetti och futurismen" (Marinetti and futurism, 1923) by the Swiss-born translator and French teacher Jean-Louis Perret (1895–1968). Perret recounts his meeting and discussion with Marinetti, but he also gives a detailed account of the history of Futurism. He concludes that Futurism had had a significant impact on Western art but it was now in decline because it had failed to renew its old ideas. Interestingly, Perret describes Futurism's golden era from 1910 to 1914 as the "Sturm und Drang-år" (Storm and stress years), which derives from the proto-Romantic movement of German literature and music (Perret 1923, 55–57). The same association reappeared later in Olsson's and Paavolainen's texts.

In the interpretations of Olsson and af Hällström, the current state of art was fundamentally built on the trail that the avant-garde had blazed. It is telling that they use the term Surrealism (in Swedish: *överrealism*) to describe the newly born period of art and the world view of the modern man (Hällström 1926; Olsson 1927a). Olsson (1927b) debates the question of the end of the avant-garde in her text published in *Svenska Pressen* on March 19, 1927, "Vi sitter inte mera på kaféer! Den franska modernismens nya signaler" (We are no longer sitting in cafés! The new signals of the French modernism), which is based on a series of interviews with French writers that were conducted by the French journalist and dramaturge André Lang (1893–1986).[5] Olsson notes how old and young writers were, despite their many disagreements, unified in the view that arguments between different isms and schools belonged to an era that had been left behind: "The stormy, dissolving period of the development of modernism—its childhood and springtime— which reached its peak in Dadaism, is unanimously regarded as past."[6] The current state and the future of literature were defined by the calm period where all previous movements were melted together to a cultural movement similar to Romanticism and Naturalism that Olsson calls surrealism. By referring to the statements of Cocteau,

5 The interviews were originally published in the journal *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, and André Lang has also published them as a book (1922).

6 "Det stormande, upplösande skedet i modernismens utveckling—dess barn och vårstadium—som nådde sin kulmen i dadaismen, anses enhälligt vara förbi" (Olsson 1927b, 4).

Roland Dorgelès, and Pierre Mac-Orlan, Olsson concludes that it was now time to concentrate on work instead of writing manifestos and arguing (Olsson 1927b).

In Finland, both the Finnish and Swedish debates on the modernism of the late 1920s were polarized into the juxtaposition between the old generation, which represented Realism, Naturalism, and traditionalism, and the new generation, which represented modernism. In this sense, Olsson's and af Hällström's descriptions of the moderation process within the international field of art can be understood as an attempt to make modernism more approachable. Instead of attacking the previous generation and its aesthetic conceptions, the new period of style was woven into the continuum of art history.

The same idea of dropping the weapons and declarations, and instead focusing on work, can be found a little later, with very similar wording in a text written by Mika Waltari (1908–79), a writer who belonged to the literary group Tulenkantajat. "Modernismi, saxophon, D-juna ja minä" (Modernism, saxophone, the D-train, and I, 1928) is written in the form of a letter and is addressed to his "Uncle"—a clear reference to the older generation. In the letter, Waltari disclaims modernism and declares that "to be a modern man—it is the same as *to work*."[7]

A Critical Period

On the Finnish part of the debate, the most significant text dealing with the conception of the end of the avant-garde is the previously mentioned foreword ("Alkulause") by Paavolainen (1927a) to Ehrenburg's (1927) essay. Paavolainen's text, however, should be taken with a pinch of salt. He was a notorious weathercock. It was Paavolainen who introduced many members of Tulenkantajat to Expressionism. However, just after a couple of years he dismissed Expressionism in favor of machine romanticism (Viljanen 1958, 294–96), and when he later openly criticized the shallow modernism of the prosaists of Tulenkantajat in his pamphlet *Suursiivous eli kirjallisessa lastenkamarissa* (Spring cleaning or in the nursery of literature, 1932), many contemporaries wondered whether he had now turned his back to his former group and modernism altogether.

Paavolainen does not really define the terminology he uses, which makes it open to interpretation what he actually means with terms such as modernity or modernism (Riikonen 2014, 115).[8] However, Paavolainen's texts were central to the

7 ". . . olla nykyajan ihminen,—se on sama kuin *tehdä työtä*" (Waltari 1928, 404).

8 For instance, in *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* Paavolainen actually mentions the word *avant-garde* when he lists the forerunners of Finnish modernism. "[M]eidän todellinen pieni avant-garde'eimme" ([O]ur true little avant-garde) includes various cultural figures from the architect

contemporary discussion on modernism in importing and spreading information about international trends. Being the inspirational leader of Tulenkantajat and the most central and well-known Finnish-speaking advocate and representative of modernism in the late 1920s, his impression of the end of the avant-garde is especially important. It shows that the phenomenon had weight in the debate on modernism.

Studies on Paavolainen usually refer to his essay collection *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* (In search of the modern age, 1929), which is a collection of his modernism-related articles previously published in periodicals. These texts were edited by Paavolainen in order to form a more coherent work. This, in turn, has led to the alteration of the original references in the articles. This is particularly true regarding "Alkulause," where Paavolainen discusses the conception of the end of the avant-garde. In *Nykyaikaa etsimässä*, Paavolainen's reference to the hidden sigh of the opponents of the avant-garde is much more ambiguous. In the original "Alkulause," on the other hand, Paavolainen brings up *Sininen Kirja* (Blue book, a periodical) as an example of the hidden sigh, and thus connects it to a contemporary debate on modernism (cf. Paavolainen 1927a, 31; 1929, 28).

The periodical was one of the few publications that presented international modernist literature in Finland. However, its editors Bergroth and Matson were profiled as representing the older generation, not least because of their criticism of the Tulenkantajat group in the two-part essay "Huomioita kirjalliselta sotarintamaltamme" (Observations on our literary war front, 1928a; 1928b).[9]

In 1927, *Sininen Kirja* had published extracts from Cocteau's new work *Le rappel à l'ordre* (1926). Quotes such as the one below were easily interpreted as *Sininen Kirja*'s attack on the modernism that Tulenkantajat represented—especially since Paavolainen had just published texts idolizing the machine culture (see, e.g., Paavolainen 1927b, 1927c, 1927d, 1927e, 1928a, 1928b):

> I am not one of them who admire the machines. The word "modern" sounds ever so naïve to me. It makes one think of a negro bowed down in front of a telephone."[10]

Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) to the Finland-Swedish poet Örnulf Tigerstedt (1900–62). Even Okkonen made it into Paavolainen's list, thanks to his presentation of new directions of painting in his essay "Maalaustaiteen uusimmista suunnista" (Paavolainen 1929, 44–52). Paavolainen obviously uses the word *avant-garde* here in a sense that is more synonymous with modernism in general than the extreme forms of modernism that the avant-garde is associated with today.

9 On the attitudes of *Sininen Kirja* toward modernism and Tulenkantajat, see Takala (1990); Nikula (1972); Bergroth and Matson (1928a; 1928b).

10 "Minä en kuulu niihin jotka ihailevat konetta. Sana 'moderni' tuntuu minusta naivilta. Tulee ajatelleeksi neekeriä, joka on polvillaan puhelimen edessä." (Cocteau 1927, 54)

The Cocteau quotes in *Sininen Kirja* gave the impression that a poet who had come to be known as a modernist had now turned his back on modernism. Thus it could be concluded that the most experimental phase of modernism had already passed.

This was at least what Paavolainen did, admitting that "the worst modernist period of storm and stress has passed, and something 'new' has born that is the result of the battle and the synthesis of the 'isms'."[11] The figure of speech is clearly borrowed from Olsson's above-cited article "Vi sitter inte mera på kaféer!" where she describes the development of modernism towards its peak in Dadaism as a bygone stormy and dissolving period (Olsson 1927b).

However, Paavolainen argued that one cannot simply dismiss the extreme phenomena of modernism (*modernismin äärimmäisyysilmiöitä*) inspired by machine culture such as Futurism, Constructivism, Abstractivism, Simultanism, and Purism. Without them one cannot comprehend Cocteau's past or present take, nor "the birth and justification of the new world view, *overrealism*, *Surrealism*, of the whole present."[12]

In his late 1920s essays that were also inserted in *Nykyaikaa etsimässä*, Paavolainen repeatedly stressed the importance of modern phenomena and modern art to the new worldview. According to Paavolainen, "a new sense of the world, a new psychology have to be found."[13] Modern artists had understood that there was a need for a new way of thinking, feeling, seeing, and describing the modern man and the world dominated by machines (Paavolainen 1927e, 43). This is why modern art was replete with descriptions of cities, machines, means of transportation, electricity, neon lights, radio waves, and other modern phenomena (Paavolainen 1927c, 23).

It is noteworthy that Paavolainen also admits some of the modernist art movements to be bygone. For example, in "Säikähtyneet muusat" (The frightened muses), he observes that Futurist painting had abated and oriented itself towards Cubism and Classicism (Paavolainen 1928a, 31–32). He ends the essay with a description of a Futurist pantomime performance that he had witnessed in Paris, which bore "a stamp of a too wealthy, too popular and official patent."[14] In a word, "Futurism is dead" (ibid, 34). Like Futurism, Dadaism also became established and stale. In the

11 "Pahin modernistinen myrsky- ja kiihkokausi on mennyt ohi, ja että on syntynyt jokin 'uusi', joka on kamppailun tulos ja 'ismien' synteesi" (Paavolainen 1927a, 32).

12 "... koko nykyhetken uuden maailmantunnon, *ylirealismin, surrealismin*, syntyä ja oikeutusta" (Paavolainen 1927a, 31–32).

13 "On löydettävä uusi maailmantunto, uusi psykologia" (Paavolainen 1927e, 43).

14 "liian rahakkuuden, liian suosion ja virallisen patenttoimisen leimaa" (Paavolainen 1928a, 34).

essay "Dada" (1927b), Paavolainen argues that Dadaism had fulfilled its mission as an artist's protest against its time: "therefore it was its [Dadaism's] time to die."[15] Paavolainen also touched upon Russian avant-garde in his essay on Alexander Blok, Sergei Yesenin, and Vladimir Mayakovsky entitled "Venäläisiä vallankumous-runoilijoita" (Russian revolution poets), noting that the state had stopped supporting Russian Futurism after 1922 (Paavolainen 1928b, 48). Unlike Italian Futurism and Dadaism, Paavolainen does not link Russian avant-garde with the celebrated new worldview, although he recognizes the impact of Blok, Yesenin, and Mayakovsky on modernist poetry. Considering the anti-Russian sentiments in Finland and the already Bolshevist stain of the avant-garde, Paavolainen perhaps thought that it would be better for the cause to keep these associations as remote as possible.

Although Paavolainen seems to admit the end of the avant-garde, he strictly opposes the conservative stance implied by the hidden sigh that the avant-garde was just a passing fad without any serious significance. As Paavolainen states in "Alkulause," they were in the middle of "murroskausi" (a critical period) where nobody believed in old truths and the truths of the future had not yet revealed themselves (Paavolainen 1927a, 27, 32). In his opinion, there is yet no Finnish-speaking critic who has "the right to talk about the results of the battles and draw syntheses,"[16] in other words, to draw conclusions about the significance of the avant-garde. Instead, Paavolainen claims that the Finland Swedes, Olsson and af Hällström, do have this right because of their lengthy pioneering work. Paavolainen thus seems to put face to face the two ways of interpreting the end of the avant-garde in Finland. And he favors the idea of the new modernist style period being born out of the avant-garde over the view of the definitive end of the avant-garde.

Like Olsson and af Hällström, Paavolainen concludes that the most extreme experimental phase had passed and that terms such as "modernism" and "machine culture" had become a part of everyday speech and experience. Various competing and short-lived trends were expected to be replaced with some kind of unifying and more general trend—a kind of conclusion of modernism, which represented the human who had come to terms with modernization. Ehrenburg calls this new romanticism, Olsson and af Hällström surrealism (Olsson 1925, 39–41; 1927a; 1927b; Hällström 1926; Ehrenburg 1927, 51; Paavolainen 1927a, 29, 32–33).

Bergroth and Matson (1928b) answered Paavolainen's accusations in their essay "Huomioita kirjalliselta sotarintamaltamme" (Observations on our literary

15 "siksi oli sen [dadaismin] aika kuolla" (Paavolainen 1927b, 80).

16 "oikeus puhua taistelujen tuloksesta ja vetää synteesejä" (Paavolainen 1927a, 33).

war front), making an interesting distinction between modern*ism* and modern*ity*. Bergroth and Matson admitted that they might have attacked modernism, but not modernity. In their view, they had defended the new against the old: "In matter of fact, Cocteau's new stand is not only more recent but also more superultramodern and radical than his old stand" (24). Paavolainen was thus clinging to the past instead of taking note of "the real new spirit of the time" (24).[17]

Bergroth and Matson criticized the elevation of the latest trends, such as Surrealism, to an all-embracing truth. In their view, the previous ten years had shown how easily various trends and movements faded away (Bergroth and Matson 1928b, 28). According to Bergroth and Matson, modernism should not be regarded only as a superficial aesthetic phenomenon, but one should be aware of its underlying political and economical forces. Modernist literature and art, as well as the discussion of modernism was free advertising for big businesses like the distributors of jazz sheet music and the dealers of modernist paintings. And the attacks against the traditions of art advocated for the interests of Soviet Russia to overthrow the bourgeois state along with other traditional values (ibid. 16–17).

A Corrective Step

Hellaakoski is one of the few mid-generation writers who brought Expressionism into Finnish literature in the 1910s (Lassila 1987, 109). When Tulenkantajat rose into the center of the modernism debate in the latter half of the 1920s by openly attacking the older generation and the literary values it represented, Hellaakoski kept a neutral distance in terms of publicity. At one time, though, Hellaakoski defended Tulenkantajat against Kojo, who was also a mid-generation writer like Hellaakoski (Hellaakoski 1929). However, Hellaakoski's relationship with the young poets was not merely positive. A closer examination shows that part of *Jääpeili*'s poems and some unpublished poems in the manuscript, in particular, were addressed to Tulenkantajat and opposed their views on modernism. An especially enlightening example is the unpublished poem "Nuorimmille" (To the youngest ones). I quote the middle of the poem:

> Ettäkö modernisteja?
> Mitä se on? uudenaikaiset mukavuudet
> Joukkopsykoosia? etistyksen laajaperäisyys
> Muotileijonismia? Snobismia à la Cocteau:
> "toujours du dernier mouvement."

17 "todellisen uuden ajanhengen kanssa" (Bergroth and Matson 1928b, 24).

ajan auto pikajuna Singapore jazz
? ääni ? tropiikin viettelijätär
yksilössä margariinireklaami
Mutta olkaapa moderneja
yksilön ääniä ajassa
kymmenen vuotta sata vuotta
niin joku nostaa hattuaan
[. . .] (Hellaakoski 1928b).

Modern*ists*, you say?
What is that? modern conveniences
Mass psychosis? the breadth of progression
Fashionable patriotism? Snobbery à la Cocteau:
'toujours du dernier mouvement.'
the voice car express train Singapore jazz
? of time ? the seductress of the tropic
in the individual margarine advertisement
Try instead to be modern
individual voices in time
ten years a hundred years
and someone will salute you.
[. . .])

The title of the poem itself reveals that the poem is addressed to Tulenkantajat, who were commonly referred to as "nuoret runoilijat" (the young poets). In addition, in the parallel verses the lists that include the car, express train, Singapore, jazz, tropical seductress, and the margarine advertisement refer to the exoticism and machine romanticism of Tulenkantajat's poetry. The most interesting part, however, is the mention of Cocteau's snobbery and of being part of the latest trend, which is a clear reference to the polemic between Paavolainen and *Sininen Kirja* on the end of the avant-garde.

The poem shows how much Hellaakoski saw Tulenkantajat's modernism as foreign, wrapped up with technique and the urban lifestyle. It is telling that Tulenkantajat's poetry crashes forward with the express train into the modern world's metropolises, while the destination in Hellaakoski's poem "Keväinen junamatka" (A train ride in the spring) is the countryside, away from the city (Hellaakoski 1928a, 7; Palmgren 1989, 99). The same complex relationship with modernism is present in *Jääpeili*'s idiom, mixing old and new. Researchers have

noted Hellaakoski's method of mixing several techniques familiar from avant-gardist poetry, such as free verse, colloquial expressions, parallel verses, onomatopoeia, lack of punctuation, omission of capital letters, and experimental typography with traditional forms of expression in poetry, such as meter and rhyme (Lyytikäinen 1995, 24, 26–28; Grünthal 1999a). This poetic strategy relates to the idea of the end of the avant-garde that was present in the debate on modernism in the 1920s.

The most central text that opens up Hellaakoski's views on modernism is the essay "Kubismista klassisismiin" (From Cubism to classicism), published in *Taiteilijaseuran joulualbumi* (The artists' association's Christmas album) in 1925, in which he examines primarily French painting of the early twentieth century, picturing the evolution leading from Expressionism to Cubism and the neo-classical turn after the World War.[18] Hellaakoski's presentation of the art field is mostly based on formal characteristics and complies well with contemporary conceptions (Ahtola-Moorhouse 1996, 123). For example, the essay has clear similarities with Okkonen's (1924) aforementioned article "Maalaustaiteen uusimmista suunnista." What is original in Hellaakoski's essay is the attempt to picture a unified line of development from Expressionism to neo-classicism. According to Hellaakoski, postwar classicism is not merely one ism among others, but a broader phenomenon. Hellaakoski states that the principle of form became the primary target of interest along with Expressionism, and prevailed in Cubism, Futurism, and Dadaism. It is telling that he states that Cubism is French Expressionism, and likewise claims Futurism to be Italian Expressionism (Hellaakoski 1925, 61, 63–64, 68, 70, 74).

It is not surprising that the importance of Expressionism is stressed, as it was an artistic movement that was of personal importance for Hellaakoski. His early work is Expressionist by nature (Lassila 1987, 75–83). He himself told how the paintings of the famous artist Tyko Sallinen (1879–1955), a member of the group of Expressionist painters Marraskuu (November), had already had a powerful impact on him at an early stage (Hellaakoski 1964, 29). Hellaakoski was also connected to Marraskuu through his friend and brother-in-law, the renowned sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen (1894–1966), who was a member of the group. In the essay "Kubismista klassisismiin," Hellaakoski examines the development of the Expressionist principle of form, primarily within Cubism. According to him, it was precisely Cubism that developed the principle of form to perfection—and even beyond, to the point of excess. Hellaakoski could stomach a Cubistic subject being simultaneously represented

18 The essay was later republished in Hellaakoski (1959).

from several different angles, but when artists started to glue objects or bits to their paintings, the experimentation had gone too far (Hellaakoski 1925, 69–70).

Hellaakoski's rejection of the collage technique illustrates his aesthetic views on the art of painting: the explicit act of brushing paint onto a canvas or similar foundation, thus stressing the purity of form. This conception of the autonomy of the different forms of art was common in the early twentieth century. For example, in his manifesto *Ordkonst och bildkonst* (Literary art and pictorial art, 1913), the Swedish writer Pär Lagerkvist (1891–1974) sees the purity of form as a defining characteristic of the modernist art of painting. Hellaakoski had most evidently familiarized himself with *Ordkonst och bildkonst*, as a copy has been found in his library, looking very well read (Viljanen 1972, 215). According to Lagerkvist, both Expressionism and Cubism seek to cleanse the art of painting from all foreign elements that disturb the composition and the artist's imagination. It is about specialization, which, characteristic of contemporary times, occurs in all areas of society. According to Lagerkvist, this has been noted to generate the best results, when artists concentrate on developing their own field (Lagerkvist 1913, 24–25).

Like Lagerkvist, Hellaakoski believed that each form of art has its own assortment of methods, which defines its identity, and in this context, individual works of art earn their meaning as the representatives of their own form of art. According to Hellaakoski, a collage into which the artist glues different objects or pieces of objects breaks away from painting as an art form (Hellaakoski 1925, 70). When questioning the artistic value of collage, Hellaakoski seems to draw a line between art and non-art, which is defined by the art institution's traditional conceptions of works and forms of art, on the one hand, and avant-gardist experiments seeking to shake the art institution, on the other. Hellaakoski clearly defends the art institution against avant-gardist attacks. Hellaakoski's stance is illustrated by the way in which he belittles the impact of the avant-garde—Dadaism in particular—in his essay, and neglects to analyze its possible incentives. Cubist collages are described as missteps, the victory of theory over rationale, and a sign of doom. To Hellaakoski, Italian Futurism had little more sense, but German and Russian avant-garde was totally incomprehensible and senseless (1925, 70).

The end of the avant-garde and the return to classicism is pictured in Hellaakoski's essay as a corrective step, where Cubism, which he believed had developed in a too theoretical and abstract direction, was steered back into the field of serious art. Hellaakoski does not pay much attention to the societal background of the post-war neo-classical turn, but finds the underlying motives to be mainly

psychological. According to him, there was a psychological need for content and meaning in painting, which the most abstract Cubism failed to take into account. Neo-classicism, however, did not mean abandoning Cubism and the Expressionist principle of form that it had developed. At the very beginning of his essay, Hellaakoski notes that Cubism had attained sustainable achievements. Apart from the short-lived phase of purist reproduction of tradition, methods developed within Cubism's principle of form were also utilized in neo-classical art (1925, 71–74).

Hellaakoski concludes his essay with an assessment of the art field's then-present state, which was characterized by the curb on the extreme notions of the avant-garde and neo-classicism. According to Hellaakoski (1925), only Germany saw the continuation of zealous Cubist-Expressionist abstractions. On the other hand, in Italy and France, the countries that he regarded as the current pioneers in the art of painting, neo-classicism had balanced out the Experimental art. In Italy, Futurism appeared to have merged into neo-classicism, while in France, neo-classicism was living in some sort of coexistence with Cubism. France had not yet seen "the emergence of a new hegemonic and unifying movement after cubism, not even by the demands of classicism."[19]

Hellaakoski's view on the end of the avant-garde differs essentially from the views of Paavolainen, Ehrenburg, Olsson, and af Hällström, who interpreted the then-current state of art as a new period of modernist style generated by the avant-garde. In Paavolainen's interpretation, in particular, emancipation from tradition, radical manifestos, and innovation played a central role: new art is born on top of the avant-garde and brings its fascination with machine culture into modern urban life. In such a perspective, Dadaism, surrealism, and neo-classicism are seen to reflect the trend that admires the modern age.

In Hellaakoski's interpretation, on the other hand, the current state of art was characterized rather by the coexistence and partial blending of regenerative and traditional movements. Although Hellaakoski, too, awaited the emergence of a unifying, more general movement of art, he refrained from making predictions. However, in relation to Hellaakoski's views on modernism and the poetics of *Jääpeili*, it is interesting to note that he specifically speaks of a unifying trend that would bring together the regenerative and traditional movements. Hellaakoski was not a classicist who cultivated the themes and meters of the classical antiquity, but he sought his own path between modernism and traditionalism by combining them

19 ". . . ei vielä kubismin jälkeen, klassillisuudenkaan vaatimuksesta, ole mitään voittoisaa yhdistävää tyyliä ilmestynyt" (Hellaakoski 1925, 74).

or rising above them. The poem "Nokipoika" (The chimney sweep) from *Jääpeili* can be seen as a programmatic example of the collection's poetics, which mixes the old and the new. I quote the first verse of the poem:

> Kun minä nokipoika laulun teen
> en sitä tee kuin Ryynekreen,
> jykerrä en moderniin en klassilliseen stiiliin,
> näppää en lyyraan en automobiiliin.[20] (Hellaakoski 1928a, 43)

> When I, the chimney sweep, compose a song
> among Ryynekreen's methods it won't belong
> no tinkering with the modern nor the classical style
> I'll pass the lyre and the automobile by a mile.

In the posthumously published *Runon historiaa* (History of poetry, 1964), Hellaakoski reminisces about how, during the process of writing *Jääpeili*, he dreamt of a new style for which he sought inspiration from new art as well as old. Besides studying old and modern art and literature (especially French modernist poets and painters), Hellaakoski mentions discussing the opportunities of Cubism and Futurism with Wäinö Aaltonen (Hellaakoski 1964, 61).

Hellaakoski's description of the preliminary work for *Jääpeili* can be seen as a textbook example of how Lagerkvist (1913) believed literature should be modernized. In *Ordkonst och bildkonst*, Lagerkvist suggests that literature must be renewed by taking examples from the theoretical foundations of Cubist and Expressionist painting, but also from the literature of ancient and primitive cultures. The same principle of purity of form, which appears in modern painting, is expressed in practice in primitive art. According to Lagerkvist, writers should thus familiarize themselves with the oldest literary heritage, such as the Bible, the Quran, the Avesta, the *Poetic Edda*, and the *Kalevala*, in order to learn the arts of simple and distilled expression and of avoiding realistic description (Lagerkvist 1913, 21, 24–25, 44–50, 56–60; Schönström 2012).

In *Jääpeili* can be found intertextual references both to modern literature, such as Charles Baudelaire and the visual poetry of F. T. Marinetti and Guillaume Apollinaire, as well as to the Bible, old hymnals, and Finnish folklore. For example, the most well-known and interpreted poem of *Jääpeili*, "Hauen laulu" (The song of

20 The name Ryynekreen refers to the national poet of Finland, Johan Ludvig Runeberg (1804–77), whose work was greatly inspired by the literature and moral standards of classical antiquity.

the pike), takes its theme—a pike climbing a tree to sing—from the folklore collection *Kanteletar* (Holsti 1969, 69). However, the poem is not written in the traditional Kalevala meter, which is probably one of the reasons why the connection with *Kanteletar* has not always been noticed. Hellaakoski thus reforms poetry by drawing from tradition and shows how something seemingly very modern can, in fact, be rather old.

The combination of old and new is also shown in the experimental typography of *Jääpeili*, especially in the last section, which is typeset in Fraktur. The oldest Finnish printed literature is in Fraktur, which was still commonly used in the early 1920s. Fraktur was associated with literature in Finnish, often religious literature, while Roman was seen as the typeface of the upper class, used for printing scientific publications and publications in foreign languages. As such, the use of Fraktur in the 1920s was nothing new. For example, Kojo had his collection of poetry *Sininen pilvi* (The blue cloud, 1920) printed entirely with a Fraktur typeface, and Joel Lehtonen (1881–1934) used typeset, hand drawn, and woodcut gothic letters in the book covers, titles, and title pages of his works, often in a parodying manner (see, for example, Lehtonen 1914; 1917; 1918; 1920a; 1920b; 1927).[21] Hellaakoski's use of Fraktur in *Jääpeili* excellently supports the last section's religious theme *vanitas vanitatum*, and at the same time refers to the history of Finnish typography and the oldest literature in Finnish.

"To Hell with the 'Modern Age!'"

Paavolainen reverted to writing about sighs in 1932 with his pamphlet *Suursiivous*: *Eli kirjallisessa lastenkamarissa*. This time, Paavolainen no longer defended the avant-garde; on the contrary, he distanced himself from Tulenkantajat by criticizing the poor state of contemporary prose, for which Tulenkantajat itself was largely responsible. Tulenkantajat had made its breakthrough mainly by publishing poetry. Over the years members of Tulenkantajat occupied the central chairs of critics, and published

21 One should be careful when interpreting the signification of typefaces because it is not always clear who has chosen them. For example, the body text of Kailas's *Tuuli ja tähkä* (The wind and the ear of wheat, 1922) is set with a Roman typeface and the titles with a Gothic typeface called Belwe Gotisch (1912). The designer of the typography is not mentioned, but it is probably not Kailas. There are reasons to believe that the book was designed by the graphic artist and book designer Toivo Vikstedt (1891–1930), who made the cover for it and showed a liking for the Belwe Gotisch. A year after the publication of *Tuuli ja tähkä*, the same publication company, Gummerus, issued an illustrated edition of Aleksis Kivi's (1834–72) *Nummisuutarit* (Heath Cobblers, 1864), which was designed by Vikstedt from the beginning to the end, including illustrations, typography, and binding. The entire text of the book was set with Belwe Gotisch.

reviews where the members patted each other on the back. This created a horizon of expectation where the prose of Tulenkantajat writers, when it started to appear, was accepted too uncritically. Paavolainen writes: "It was as if the whole country let a sigh of relief, when we could finally commence praising and declaring the arrival of new masters. . . ."[22]

The most important model for *Suursiivous* was probably *La farce de l'art vivant: Une campagne picturale 1928–1929* (The farce of living art: A pictorial campaign 1928–1929, 1929) by the French symbolist poet and conservative art critic Camille Mauclair (pseudonym for Séverin Faust, 1872–1945) (Riikonen 2014, 165–66). The work was translated into Finnish in 1931, and Paavolainen published a review of it (Paavolainen 1931). Paavolainen took the motto of *Suursiivous* from Mauclair's work, and its influence can also be felt in Paavolainen's style of writing. In *La farce de l'art vivant* Mauclair attacks the avant-garde painting, assimilating it with Bolshevism and the art of the mentally ill. He thought this internationalist "communisme pictural" (pictorial communism) was a profitable commercial operation led by Jewish art dealers who conspired to uproot French intellectual and moral traditions.

In his review, Paavolainen compliments the style of Mauclair's book but also observes its dangers: it encourages the Finnish audience to ignore the merits of the avant-garde art (Paavolainen 1931, 162). Interestingly, Paavolainen seems to admit that the avant-garde—or what Mauclair calls "ugliness"—in painting is backing away. This, however, is not a result of the attacks of the likes of Mauclair, but because "art and artists have themselves started to blaze new trails. As a matter of fact, 'Neoclassicism,' 'Neoromanticism,' 'Neue Sachlichkeit' are all countermovements to the art of 'ugliness' (Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism etc.)."[23]

Suursiivous was a scandal when it came out, not only because Paavolainen had harshly attacked contemporary prose, but first and foremost because he appeared to have abandoned his previous modernist values (cf. Olli 1932). It is illustrative that Paavolainen dedicated his book not only to Lauri Viljanen (1900–84), a member of Tulenkantajat, poet, critic, and researcher in literature, but also to his former nemesis Bergroth, one of *Sininen Kirja*'s editors. In his pamphlet, Paavolainen criticizes precisely the superficial description of modernism by contemporary prose. It seems as if the young prose writers had even adopted his teachings from the late 1920s

22 "Koko maa päästi ikäänkuin helpotuksen huokauksen, kun vihdoinkin saatiin ruveta kehumaan ja julistamaan uusien mestareiden tuloa . . ." (Paavolainen 1932, 30).

23 ". . . taide ja taiteilijat itse ovat lähteneet etsimään uusia uria. 'Uusklassillisuus', 'uusromantiikka' ja 'Neue Sachlichkeit' ovat kaikki itse asiassa vastavirtauksia 'rumuuden' taiteelle (ekspressionismi, kubismi, futurismi, surrealismi jne.)" (Paavolainen 1931, 156).

too rigorously. He mentions Viljo Saraja's (1900–70) novel *Taivas yllämme—meri allamme* (The sky above us, the ocean beneath us, 1929) as the most crude example; Paavolainen proves that several of its passages were plagiarized from his own essays. "Hiiteen 'nykyaika!'" (To hell with the 'modern age!') Paavolainen curses, and prays to the Lord to protect him from new disciples (Paavolainen 1932, 145, 151, 160). As in the case of Cocteau, it seemed as though a former modernist had become an anti-modernist.

Paavolainen's pamphlet represents the end of the more permissive and experimental era of Finnish literature in the 1920s. In Finland, the 1930s brought along a more frigid economic and political as well as cultural atmosphere. The economic boom of the 1920s ended in a worldwide recession, the far right gained a foothold in politics, thus challenging the democratic foundation of the young state, and the debate regarding modernism and the avant-garde withered away. *Suursiivous*, in the end, made it clear that the story of Tulenkantajat, which had already started to break down, had now come to an end. It is also noteworthy that after *Jääpeili* Hellaakoski did not write poetry for over a decade. P. Mustapää, alias of folklorist Martti Haavio (1899–1973)—one of the most experimental Finnish poets of the 1920s, who was also closely associated with Tulenkantajat—shared a similar fate: his break from poetry lasted eighteen years. The debate about modernism was brought back to life only after World War II, which is what many see as the starting point of actual Finnish modernist literature.

Contemporaries, however, did not hesitate to see Tulenkantajat as modernists. As the case of Paavolainen shows, there is no such thing as one modernism—possibly not even for one single person. In retrospect, modernist works in Finnish from the late 1920s appear rather modest, if the avant-gardes of the historical art centers are used as reference. But examined from the perspective of its contemporaries, a rather different view is presented. Both the opponents of the avant-garde as well as its defenders seemed to be under the impression that the avant-garde had already passed elsewhere in Europe. This might offer a partial explanation for why the reception of the avant-garde and its adoption into art was fairly spiritless.

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